

NORFOLK NAVAL SHIPYARD, BUILDING 28A  
Adjoining Buildings 28 and 29 fronting  
Shubrick and Breeze Streets  
Portsmouth  
Portsmouth County  
Virginia

HAER No. VA-65-B

HAER  
1A  
65-PORTM,  
1B-

#### PHOTOGRAPHS

#### WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

#### HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service  
Northeast Region  
U.S. Custom House  
200 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

NORFOLK NAVAL SHIPYARD, BUILDING 28A HAER No. VA-65-B

HAER  
VA  
65-PORTH,  
13-

Location: Adjoining Buildings 28 and 29  
fronting Shubrick and Breeze  
Streets  
Norfolk Naval Shipyard  
Portsmouth  
Virginia

USGS Norfolk South Quadrangle,  
Universal Transverse Mercator  
Coordinates: 18.384490.4075675

Date of Construction: 1918

Present Owner: Norfolk Naval Shipyard  
Portsmouth, Virginia

Present Use: Vacant. The building is scheduled  
for removal in 1992.

Significance: Building 28A was constructed during  
World War I mobilization of the  
United States Navy Yard. The infill  
structure, which utilizes party  
walls from Buildings 28 and 29,  
provided an economical solution to  
the facility's increased industrial  
spatial requirements.

Project Information Statement: Building 28A will be removed to  
accommodate new construction in the  
Norfolk Naval Shipyard. Recordation  
of the building prior to demolition  
was prescribed as a stipulation of  
a project Memorandum of Agreement  
negotiated between the Norfolk  
Naval Shipyard, the Virginia State  
Historic Preservation Office, and  
the Advisory Council on Historic  
Preservation to mitigate the  
removal of the building. This  
documentation was undertaken in  
accordance with that agreement.

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The Norfolk Naval Shipyard occupies a site that has been in continuous industrial use since the second half of the eighteenth century. Established in 1767, the shipyard operated as a private concern until its acquisition by the United States government in 1801. The historical development of the facility reflects advances in naval architectural and technology, as well as the changing emphasis of United States defense policy. The buildings contained within the Norfolk Naval Shipyard document the progression of maritime technology from the construction of sailing ships to the fabrication of contemporary nuclear-powered vessels.

Building Description. Building 28A, constructed as a temporary storage facility in 1918, is associated with the shipyard's World War I industrial mobilization. The one-story, monumental scale, industrial structure occupies a rectangular ground plan measuring 54'-0" by 385'-0". Building 28A is located between Breeze and Shubrick Streets within the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, a heavy industrial complex devoted to the repair and construction of naval vessels.

The building spans a former alley between Buildings 28 and 29 and utilizes the load-bearing brick walls from the adjoining structures as its east and west walls. Building 28 was constructed as the shipyard Mast House and was completed in 1836. Building 29 was constructed as a Boat House and also was completed in 1836.

The three-bay north and south gable-end elevations of Building 28A are sheathed in corrugated metal panels supported by a metal frame. The structure rises to a gable roof incorporating a extended roof monitor that also terminates in a gable roof. The roof employs a common purlin framing system and is clad in corrugated metal panels. Nine-light metal frame hopper windows band the east and west elevations of the roof monitor and provide light to the structure's interior.

Entrances to the building are located in the central bays of the north and south elevation. The symmetrical north elevation includes a slightly recessed double-leaf wood door incorporating a twelve-light over wooden panel design. The entrance to the asymmetrical south elevation has been modified to include solid panel double-leaf wood doors enframed by a simple wood surround.

Windows are located on the north and south elevation doors flanking the building entrance. North elevation windows are double twenty-one-light fixed sash wood units topped by twelve-light transoms. South elevation multi-light windows are composed of multiple wooden units enframed by simple wood surrounds.

The interior of the building was designed as unobstructed open space. The original interior plan of the northern half of the structure was modified through the addition of temporary wood and corrugated metal partitions. Three work areas were created through this division. The northern two areas include single office cubicles.

The building is supported by a metal truss system utilizing a modified Warren truss design. The bottom cord of the roof trusses are keyed to the exterior walls of adjoining Buildings 28 and 29. The interior of Building 28A is open industrial space. Floors are poured concrete, walls are exposed brick, and the roof system is exposed. Double leaf industrial doors, located at three bay intervals along the east interior wall, provide access to Building 28. These entries correspond to the original design of Building 28. The first story bay divisions of Building 29 have been infilled with brick or plywood panels.

Historical Context. The Norfolk Naval Shipyard (NNSY), Portsmouth, Virginia presently covers an 811 acre parcel located on the west bank of the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, in Portsmouth, Virginia. The shipyard was founded in 1767 by Scottish immigrant, Andrew Sprowie. The private shipyard, which Sprowie named Gosport, was located one-half mile south of the City of Portsmouth. Sprowie, a Loyalist, forfeited title to Gosport to the Commonwealth of Virginia following The American War of Independence.<sup>1</sup> On June 15, 1801, title of the 15.25 acre shipyard was transferred from the Commonwealth of Virginia to the United States for \$12,000.00.<sup>2</sup>

The first buildings constructed at Gosport to accommodate naval ship construction were a spar shed, a timber shed, and riverfront wharves.<sup>3</sup> In 1826, following a survey of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Boston, New York, and Gosport, Congress selected the Boston and Gosport shipyards as the location for the Navy's first drydocks.

In November 1828, development plans for additional construction at the Gosport facility were approved. The plans included reclaiming parts of the river and the timber dock, lining the fill with stone walls, and constructing new buildings on the

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<sup>1</sup>Butt, *A Brief History of Norfolk Naval Shipyard*, 1.

<sup>2</sup>Butt, *A Brief History of Norfolk Naval Shipyard*, 1.

<sup>3</sup>Lull, *History of the United States Navy-Yard at Gosport, Virginia*, 18.

reclaimed land. Building 28 was constructed as the Mast House, and built almost entirely on land reclaimed from the river. The following year, yard Commander Lewis Warrington reported that Building 28, the Mast House, was completed at the cost of \$101,004.74.<sup>4</sup> Building 29, a Boat House located west of Building 28, also was completed at that time. The timber dock was under construction.<sup>5</sup> Two ship houses, office buildings located in the vicinity of the north wall, the commandant's house, and sections of the marine barracks were the only pre-1827 buildings retained in the shipyard expansion project.<sup>6</sup> After 1836, the antebellum development of the shipyard progressed slowly.

Shortly after the bombardment of Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, the Commonwealth of Virginia seceded from the Union. The state laid claim to the Gosport Navy Yard. The United States Secretary of War Gideon Welles, fearing that Gosport would fall into the hands of Virginia troops, dispatched a contingent of 100 Marines from Washington, D.C., on April 19, 1861, under orders were to destroy the facilities at Gosport and to retrieve the ships stationed there. The Marines landed at the yard, set charges to destroy the facilities, and burned the ships in the Elizabeth River.

The Virginia troops who occupied the Gosport Navy Yard on April 21, 1861, found the yard badly damaged, but serviceable. A report prepared by Confederate paymaster, William H. Peters, noted that several substantial workshops were undamaged and the drydock was operational. The ironclad C.S.S. *Virginia* was constructed in the dry dock from the remains of the U.S.S. *Merrimac*, one of the ships burned to the water line during the Union evacuation. In March 1862, the C.S.S. *Virginia* engaged the iron-clad U.S.S. *Monitor* in nearby Hampton Roads and marked the end of the sailing navy era.

Union troops landed in the Tidewater area as part of General George McClellan's Peninsular Campaign in May 1862. Engaging in a

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<sup>4</sup>See Appendix 1 for Building 28 yearly Congressional appropriations, 1832-1836.

<sup>5</sup> *Annual Report of Expenditures and Estimates: 1836-1837*, Record Group 71, Entry 56, National Archives,

<sup>6</sup>Lull, *History of the United States Navy-Yard at Gosport, Virginia*, 39.

<sup>7</sup>*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Vol. V, 221.

strategic withdrawal, Confederate General Joseph Johnston ordered the Gosport Navy Yard abandoned and destroyed. On May 10, the Confederate forces burned the facility. The Union contingent that occupied the yard following the Confederate withdrawal found all the buildings, with the exception of the officers' quarters, substantially damaged by fire.<sup>8</sup> John W. Livingston was appointed commander of the yard, rechristened the U.S. Navy Yard, Norfolk, Virginia, on May 20, 1862. The first priority of the new commander was to return the base to operational status, and comprehensive repair of the fire damaged buildings was not part of this priority. An albumen print of the shipyard, executed by Alexander Gardner in December 1864 depicts damage to the yard in the vicinity of the Building 28. The building shell of the structure is intact.

In January 1866, the first post-war commandant of the U.S. Navy Yard, Norfolk, Commodore R.B. Hitchcock, reported that the quality of the war time repairs to the yard was very poor and recommended building replacement. An 1866 map of the U.S. Navy Yard indicated that Building 28, along with other structures, was damaged during the war. Building 28 was repaired by January 1866. Adjoining Buildings 29, 30, and 31 sustained greater damage. Major repair work was undertaken at a cost of over \$100,000.00. Commodore Hitchcock directed that former one-story buildings be expanded to two stories during the rebuilding process. Building 29, which adjoins Building 28A to the west, was one of the structures expanded to two-stories in February 1866.<sup>9</sup>

During the post-war period, the U.S. Navy experienced an increased demand for shore facilities. The expansion of the fleet during the Civil War took place without a commensurate increase in the construction of shore facilities to service the larger number of vessels. The shore establishment was less capable of serving the fleet than in the pre-war years due to the extensive damage suffered at Norfolk and Pensacola Navy Yards, coupled with the closing of the shipyard in Memphis, Tennessee. The 1865 Annual Report to the Secretary of War identified the lack of space at Navy shore facilities as hampering the ability of the fleet to operate effectively. Exacerbating the problem was the rise of iron-clad technology. All of the existing Navy Yards were designed for the

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<sup>8</sup>*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Vol. VII, 342.

<sup>9</sup>National Archives, "Letters Received from Commandants of Navy Yards - Norfolk," Record Group 71.

construction and maintenance of a wooden fleet.<sup>10</sup> The national debt created by the prosecution of the Civil War restrained Congress from appropriating funds to improve Navy facilities.<sup>11</sup> In 1874, a U.S. Senate Committee on Naval Affairs was requested by Congress to study possible Naval Yard closures. The committee recommended the expansion of the Norfolk yard, citing its strategic location. In 1883, a similar committee was convened by Congress. The committee noted that Navy Yard, Norfolk, had the capability to build and repair wooden ships of all sizes, but was unable to construct, or even drydock, the new iron-hulled Chicago class vessels.

During the early 1880s the United States moved to modernize its fleet. U.S. Navy Yard, Norfolk, launched its first steel-sheathed cruiser, the *U.S.S. Raleigh*, in 1892, in time for the Inter-national Columbian Naval Rendezvous in Hampton Roads, Virginia. That same year, the keel was laid for the *U.S.S. Texas*, a second-class battleship with a steel hull and powered exclusively by steam.<sup>12</sup>

The United States entry into the First World War in 1917 increased the shipyard production and limited the mission of the United States Navy Yard, Norfolk, Virginia. Fleet support and shore training functions were transferred to a new installation at Sewell's Point named the Norfolk Naval Operating Base. Commander C.F. Stansworth noted in his book, *Naval Bases of the World*, "The dredged channel of the Elizabeth River from Hampton Roads to Norfolk, eleven and three fourths miles is crooked, congested with commerce, and it has been necessary to establish a supply depot at Hampton Roads, entitled 'Operating Base'."<sup>13</sup> From this point forward, the mission of the shipyard was confined to ship construction and repair. While many of the facility's operations were transferred to Sewell's Point, war demand created a need for more industrial space and a new round of shipyard construction began. Structures built at the navy yard during the First World War period included a new power plant, a machine shop, a foundry, a paint shop, oil storage tanks, a pattern shop, a forge shop, a

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<sup>10</sup>Hirrel, "Military Technology." Ms. in Progress. R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, 1992.

<sup>11</sup>Hirrel, "Military Installations: An Overview." Ms. in Progress. R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc., 1992.

<sup>12</sup>Butt, *A Brief History of Norfolk Naval Shipyard*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Navy General Files, Record Group 71, "1901-1925," Box G, National Archives.

galvanizing plant, a shipfitters building, several storage sheds, and other structures.<sup>14</sup>

Several proposals were developed prior to World War I to accommodate shipyard expansion. These plans emphasized intensive use of existing shipyard space. A May 1916 proposal to the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts by the Navy Yard Supply Officer suggested that open spaces between buildings in the yard might be suitable for enclosure. No documents directly related to the construction of Building 28A have been uncovered. The contract files in the collection of the National Archives, however, include references to a \$40,000.00 appropriation made for general improvements in the yard in 1918. The enclosure of Davis Avenue, between Buildings 28 and 29, is likely to have been undertaken as part of these general improvements. A 1918 construction date for the infill structure is supported further by data included in a report entitled, "Detailed Inventory of Naval Shore Facilities" published in September 1991. This report identified Building 28A as a structure erected in 1918.<sup>15</sup> In addition, an unprovenienced document, "Public Works of the Navy - Buildings", dated ca 1946 and contained in the collection of the Portsmouth Naval Ship Yard Museum, identifies shipyard buildings, their uses, materials, dimensions, and capacities. In this document, Building 28A is noted as a temporary storage facility constructed in 1918 at the cost of \$16,781.00. The first building specifications on record for the structure were plans for a steam-heating system for Buildings 28 and 28A dated October 1918. Other structures built at the navy yard during the First World War period included a new power plant, a machine shop, a foundry, a paint shop, oil storage tanks, a pattern shop, a forge shop, a galvanizing plant, a shipfitters' building, several storage sheds, and other structures.<sup>16</sup>

During the post World War I years, employment at the U.S. Navy Yard, Norfolk, Virginia dropped below pre-war levels. In 1929, the U.S. Navy Yard was renamed the Norfolk Navy Yard, Portsmouth, Virginia. Construction of vessels was resumed at the yard in 1933 as a result of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), a New Deal program. Nine destroyers at the Norfolk Navy Yard were constructed under this program; five were completed by the time war

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<sup>14</sup>Stewart, "Norfolk, VA., Naval Shipyard, 1767-," in *United States Navy and Marine Corps Bases: Domestic*, 394.

<sup>15</sup>"Volume 2: Area served by LANTNAVFACENGCOM," *Detailed Inventory of Naval Shore Facilities*, 2.

<sup>16</sup>Stewart, "Norfolk, VA., Naval Shipyard, 1767-," in *United States Navy and Marine Corps Bases: Domestic*, 394.



broke out in Europe in 1939.<sup>17</sup> During the Second World War, the function of Building 28A was partially changed; in 1944 the north eighth of the structure was converted to filing space for the Machine Drawing Division. With the conclusion of the Second World War, Norfolk Naval Shipyard was once again renamed. On December 1, 1945 the Norfolk Navy Yard became known officially as Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth, Virginia. Building 28A was altered to accommodate the photo and radar laboratory shop facilities. The modifications included sealing door and window openings with plywood, installing a ramp to Building 29, cleaning, and painting. Double doors also were added to doorways between Buildings 28 and 29. Between 1944 and 1949, the Machine Drawing Filing Room was converted to vehicle storage.<sup>18</sup>

During the Korean War, the Norfolk Naval Shipyard served mainly as a repair station. An electronics building was erected enabling the shipyard to construct and service nuclear vessels.<sup>19</sup>

In 1956, a new roof was installed on Building 28A and the building's designation was upgraded from a temporary to a semi-permanent structure. By 1958 Building 28A had reverted to storage space, with the exception of the former vehicle storage area that again housed the Machinery Drawing Filing Room.<sup>20</sup>

The most recent record containing information on Building 28A was prepared in September 1991. At that time the structure housed divisions of the Temporary Services, Painting and Blasting, and Central Tool Shops. Since that time Building 28A has been abandoned and currently is slated for demolition to accommodate expansion of the shipyard.

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<sup>17</sup>Butt, *A Brief History of Norfolk Naval Shipyard*, 11; Stewart, "Norfolk, VA., Naval Shipyard, 1767-," in *United States Navy and Marine Corps Bases: Domestic*, 395.

<sup>18</sup>25 November 1944. Plan for Building 28A; Room for Filing Department: North End.

<sup>19</sup>Stewart, "Norfolk, VA., Naval Shipyard, 1767-," in *United States Navy and Marine Corps Bases: Domestic*, ed. Paolo E. Coletta, 396.

<sup>20</sup>28 October 1958, Building 28: Supply department Alterations Architectural Electrical.

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